

# Florida Civic Advance



## FLORIDA CIVIC ADVANCE: COLLABORATING FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES

June 2014

Robert Jones & Dr. Stuart Langton

FCRC Consensus Center, Florida State University

### FLORIDA'S CIVIC CHALLENGE

Florida ranks near last among states when it comes to civic health. A 2008 study found that among the 50 states, Florida ranked 32 in voter turnout, 40th in citizens helping neighbors, 44th in philanthropy, and 47th in people volunteering and attending public meetings. A 2009 study of the civic health of the 50 largest U.S. cities ranked Miami last, Orlando 48, and Tampa and Jacksonville tied at 47<sup>th</sup>. In 2011, a study of Florida youth aged 18–29 said they were, “the most disengaged group in one of the most civically disengaged states.” It concluded: “The implications of this for the Sunshine State are enormous, given that in years to come they will be the largest single voting cohort in the nation.”

Beyond these sobering civic metrics, there are many observable signs of civic disunion in Florida including incivility among people of all ages, toxic political partisanship, voter suppression and electoral mismanagement, intergenerational segregation, and ethnic and racial tension. Clearly there are sharp divisions among Floridians. Political party registration is more competitive than any other large state. The degree of income inequality is one of the highest in the nation. A recent survey showed that 36% of Floridians think the state is moving in the right direction, but 39% disagree. Author Carl Hiassen sums it up this way: “Floridians are so divided they cannot even agree of the design of their license plate.”

Why is civic life so poor in Florida? The major culprit is hyper-growth. Between 1950 and 2000, Florida's population grew by 470%. California's rate, by contrast, was 220%. Consequently, Florida has never developed civic institutions to keep up with its expansion. Today Florida ranks 48<sup>th</sup> among the 50 states in terms of the presence of non-profit organizations per capita, a key element of civic health. Among the eight most densely populated states, seven were founded before the Articles of

Confederation was signed in 1781, and they have had time to develop strong civic cultures. Florida, which ranks 8<sup>th</sup> in density, was not established until 1845. In the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century its staggering growth took it from the 33<sup>rd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> largest state. So, Florida, then and now, has remained a laggard in civic development because of the extraordinary pace of growth.

To compound Florida's civic challenge, the state is the most uniquely diverse in the union. It is the most transitory with over 94 million visitors and part time residents a year. Today it is oldest with 17.3% of the population over 65. It is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse with a population of persons who are 16.5% African-American and 22.9% of Hispanic origin. Only 35.5% of the population is native born, and over 19% are foreign born. Migrants outnumber the growth in the native population each year, and nearly half of the migrants to Florida today are from another country. So, finding ways to connect and engage people of such divergent background and interest in building community and solving problems makes Florida's civic challenge all the more daunting.

## **A COMMITMENT TO CIVIC IMPROVEMENT**

Improving civic health in Florida will not be easy, but it is not impossible. While the bad news is that Florida has poor civic health rankings, the good news is that there is growing public concern about this and there are many signs of civic excellence, innovation, and progress. For example, in the last decade, 10 Florida communities have been selected by the National Civic League as "All-America Cities," every public university in Florida has made a strategic commitment to community service, and 12 Florida universities have been recognized by the Carnegie Foundation for excellence in community engagement.

New institutions have also been created to promote good citizenship and civic engagement such as the Bob Graham Center for Public Service at the University of Florida and the Lou Frey Institute of Politics and Government at the University of Central Florida. These institutions were instrumental in the passage of the Sandra Day O'Connor Civic Education Act in 2010 to strengthen civic education in Florida schools. Professional organization such the Florida Bar Association and the Florida League of Cities have also increased their attention to issues of civility and civic engagement in recent years. A 2009 study by the FCRC Consensus Center at Florida State University discovered considerable innovation in community improvement work in Florida with hundreds of talented people dedicated to this, but found that there needs to be more effort within the State University System to promote strategic thinking and encourage collaboration in fostering civic improvement.

Florida Civic Advance, the project described below, is a collaborative undertaking by a consortium of Florida organizations, each with a long and successful history of helping local communities. Its concern is to strengthen short-term assistance to Florida communities that want to improve their civic life, to help them build capacity over time, and to help make Florida a leader in civic performance and innovation. Led by the FCRC Florida Consensus Center at Florida State University, the project participants and potential partners include: FSU Askew School of Public Policy; UCF Frey Institute for Politics; UCF Institute of Government; UF Bob Graham Center for Public Service; Leadership Florida; Florida League of Cities; Florida Association of Counties; AARP Florida; Florida Chamber Foundation; Volunteer Florida, Florida Regional Councils Association and the Federal Reserve, Atlanta.

Florida Civic Advance seeks to demonstrably improve the poor quality of civic life in Florida's

communities. We believe that now, more than ever, local communities have become the new laboratories of democracy and civic engagement. The organizations participating in Florida Civic Advance network want to help “make Florida home” a reality for citizens in every community in the sunshine state. Our strategy is to bolster the capacity for communities and citizens to engage with each other in order to achieve prosperity, equity and civic health. Regardless of the challenges facing communities, we emphasize collaboration as the key ingredient needed for advancing constructive civic dialogue and action. That will be the path to finding consensus solutions that strengthen our civic life and make our communities more vital and successful.

Our commitment to work together on issues of civic advance is inspired by three shared convictions:

## **A. IMPROVING COMMUNITY CIVIC CAPACITY IS AN URGENT MATTER FOR FLORIDA.**

Civic advancement is a matter of urgency as Florida’s accelerated growth rate will resume as we climb out of the current economic downturn. It is projected that Florida’s population of over 19 million will grow by over 30% by 2040 to over 25 million residents. The civic stress that will accompany this growth will be compounded because Florida has some of the worst urban congestion in the nation, a decaying infrastructure, inadequate support for public and higher education, an aging population with increasing public health and health care needs and costs, and declining water supply and quality. In the near future, Florida communities can expect heightened battles over growth and new development, responding to climate change impacts and addressing challenging social and generational issues. Debate over needed public investment and expenditures will take place in a climate where large majorities distrust local and state elected officials and where mediating institutions and practices are weak or non-existent and citizen participation and civic engagement is under developed.

## **B. CIVIC HEALTH DOES MATTER IN PLANNING FLORIDA’S FUTURE.**

Public leaders seldom concern themselves with matters of civic culture, but that is changing as research shows that citizen engagement and intergroup and inter-sector collaboration contributes to success in areas of economic development, educational reform, and crime reduction. So, one reason for undertaking the Florida Civic Advance is to foster understanding that civic matters do matter-- they cannot be taken for granted, and more efforts are needed to actively encourage civic improvement. As the Florida Chamber of Commerce Foundation has said in its 20 Year Strategic Plan for Florida, “Citizens actively engaged in their communities are vital, not just because engagement fosters trust in public institutions and legitimacy in political processes, but also because it is correlated to a strong educational system, a competitive workforce, and a dynamic economy.”



## **C. COLLABORATION IS THE KEY TO CIVIC ADVANCE IN FLORIDA.**

The study that rated the civic health of Florida’s largest cities so poorly and Minneapolis-St Paul to be the healthiest said, “Minneapolis-St Paul civil servants, public officials, and citizens have traditions and policies of collaboration that enhance satisfaction with public institutions, leaders, and other citizens, and maintain a spirit of creativity and inclusion.” As other research confirms, collaboration is at the heart of effective civic performance.

The Florida Civic Advance embraces collaboration as its core principle in order to encourage civic advancement. Accordingly, the project focus is on collaborative best practices and innovations initiated by government in cooperation with the private and non profit sectors and referred to as “Collaborative Governance,” as well as “Community Collaborations” that are typically led by the private and nonprofit sectors. Emphasis is also given to “collaborative leadership” training for potential community leaders, including students.

## **ABOUT THE FLORIDA CIVIC ADVANCE (FCA)**

The Florida Civic Advance (FCA) is a collaborative initiative to strengthen the civic health and capacity of Florida communities. The initiative focuses on identifying, recognizing, examining, showcasing and sharing learning about best civic practices and innovations in Florida. The project will offer encouragement, education, and assistance to current and potential community leaders through organizations they know and trust. The strategic advantage of the project is that it builds upon civic success models in Florida and provides a vehicle for those who share a commitment to community civic improvement to work together.

### **A. FLORIDA CIVIC ADVANCE PURPOSE**

The aim of the Florida Civic Advance is to help Florida communities improve their civic health and capacity. It will also seek to create opportunities for citizens and leaders from different backgrounds to celebrate, plan, work, solve problems, and build consensus on challenges together. The project promotes civic behaviors such as volunteering, philanthropic giving, helping neighbors, staying informed, attending public meetings, voting and collaborative leadership. It will highlight the importance of increasing collaboration among government, business, and non-profit groups to address and solve community challenges and seek to develop and improve non-profit organizations and their capacity to enhance the civic health of communities. It will recognize and showcase communities that use civic engagement to develop consensus on vision and goals and provide opportunities for citizens to deliberate about and collaborate on important community issues.

### **B. FLORIDA CIVIC ADVANCE CORE IDEA**

Despite poor civic health rankings, there are hundreds of examples of civic excellence and innovation in Florida. For example, Jacksonville Florida and the Miami –Ft. Lauderdale-Palm Beach Florida were ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of the top 7 “American Dream Cities” among 51 MSAs in

the 2013 State of the American Dream Survey released in June 2014.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, few of these good cases have been identified, studied, documented or shared. This is an unfortunate waste of social capital as there are many lessons to be learned that will encourage communities that want to improve their civic life. The core idea of this project is to identify, study, recognize, reward, publicize, and share these important civic examples and to encourage replication and further innovation as a result.

### C. KEY AUDIENCES

The primary audience for this project is community leaders who are in a position to improve civic life. This includes elected and appointed government officials, and equally important, business and nonprofit group and community leaders. A secondary audience is educators who can encourage student civic engagement, research, and technical assistance to communities. Another audience is the general public, including students, who may become better informed and encouraged to be more engaged in their communities.

### D. FLORIDA CIVIC ADVANCE PROPOSED PROJECT GOALS



The Florida Civic Advance has proposed five interrelated goals:

1. **TO RECOGNIZE** outstanding civic practices, programs and collaborative leaders in Florida through an annual showcase recognition program.
2. **TO DEMONSTRATE** innovative and successful practices and strategies to improve community life in areas such as collaborative economic development, citizen engagement in

---

<sup>1</sup> Xavier University Center for the Study of the American Dream conducts an annual survey that gauges what the American Dream is and to whom. It provides an ad hoc analysis of resident sentiment looking at 35 factors in the 51 metropolitan statistical areas with populations of 1 million or more. The 2013 seven American Dream cities and regions had a ADCI score index of 105 or greater compared to the national average. Residents in these cities believe they are achieving the American Dream to a meaningfully greater degree than residents in the balance of the MSAs studied. <http://strengtheningbrandamerica.com/tools/2013-american-dream-cities/>

collaborative planning and policy making, and increased intergenerational community engagement and service.

3. **TO FACILITATE** collaborative efforts that can strengthen Florida communities' civic and collaborative capacity and performance.
4. **TO LEARN** why and how different kinds of communities improve their civic capacity, collaborative capability and performance while others do not.
5. **TO SHARE** information and knowledge about how to strengthen civic capacity, collaborative leadership and performance with community leaders and public officials throughout Florida.

## **E. FCA PROPOSED ACTIVITIES AND COMPONENTS**

The four major components of the Florida Civic Advance are:

### **1. FLORIDA CIVIC ADVANCE ANNUAL PROGRAM**

This event will provide an annual opportunity to review challenges and progress in improving civic life in Florida through collaborative approaches. It will also be used as an occasion to showcase innovative examples of collaboration in practice offered by FCA partners aimed at enhancing civic health in Florida's communities. Researchers will use the event as an occasion to develop and refine a shared Florida Civic Research Agenda and to identify special issue priorities for the next year. Cluster programs, panels and workshops will be held for public officials, business and nonprofit community leaders, the media, students, and researchers.

### **2. FCA CIVIC INCUBATOR: RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**



In addition to reporting on civic best practices and innovation in Florida, the Florida Civic Advance will encourage, support, and undertake research and development projects of practical interest to Florida communities. Functioning as a civic incubator, the project will encourage civic entrepreneurship and innovative practice through pilot demonstration efforts. Utilizing its university connections, the initiative may also undertake some projects



directly or in partnerships with others. The earliest project priorities are collaborative economic development, intergenerational community engagement, citizen engagement in collaborative planning and policy making, promoting civility in the neighborhood and workplace, and engaging and connecting new Floridians.

### 3. THE FLORIDA CIVIC OBSERVATORY AND SHOWCASE



The Florida Civic Observatory is the vehicle through which this program develops knowledge about the state of civic affairs in Florida and beyond. On an ongoing basis, information will be gathered from FCA partners and others about exemplary and promising civic initiatives in different types of Florida communities. This information will be used to conduct studies, surveys, and interviews to learn more about best civic collaborative leadership strategies, and practices in Florida. Case studies, reports, articles and video presentations will be developed to share findings. An annual SHOWCASE of outstanding initiatives will be presented at the Florida Civic Advance annual conference, and additional information will be reported regularly on the project website and distributed through media outlets and websites of participating partner organizations. The Observatory will also report on research and development projects, relevant research in Florida and globally, and innovative programs throughout the nation and world of relevance to Florida communities. The Civic Observatory will be housed at the Askew School of Public Administration at Florida University. A network of scholars and students from Florida State and other Florida universities will be developed to carry out the observatory functions and to encourage and undertake additional research about civic and community development issues.

### 4. THE FLORIDA CIVIC ADVANCE DISSEMINATION NETWORK



The Florida Civic Observatory will develop project materials to be disseminated through a variety of platforms including: social media, conference presentations and proceedings, a project website, webinars, written articles, the annual Florida Civic Advance Showcase Program, briefings at meetings of partner organizations, radio and television appearances and programs, courses, webinars and workshops. An annual dissemination plan will be developed with partner organizations including a list of resource persons, speakers bureau and training opportunities for local civic leaders.

## **ENVISIONING FLORIDA AS A LEADER IN CIVIC INNOVATION**



The Florida Civic Advance through its collaborating partners and organizations will bring about a change public consciousness about the value of civic life in Florida. Increasingly the public will better understand Florida's civic challenges, the reasons for them, and actions and strategies to improve civic life in their communities. Professionals will be encouraged to witness the degree of interest, participation, commitment, and collaboration among institutions in working together to advance Florida's civic life.

As this takes place, Florida will be increasingly appreciated as a great state laboratory for civic improvement, collaboration and innovation. Over time, measures of civic health will be strengthened throughout Florida and communities will become much more effective in getting residents to collaborate in planning, problem-solving and service. As this happens, leaders and the public will think about Florida as a state of civic innovation and as a leader rather than a laggard in civic performance.

## **FLORIDA CIVIC ADVANCE-- PROPOSED ORGANIZATION**

The organizational form of the FCA project is proposed as a flat, team-oriented and task-distributed model. The FCRC Consensus Center at FSU will serve as the executive coordinator, fiscal agent, and network convener. Governance decisions regarding strategies and directions will be made by a Steering Group of representatives from partner organizations on a consensual basis. Partner organizations will develop a project management agreement to guide their work and roles with the FCA.



All activities will be distributed to work teams with designated leaders selected from among partner organizations. The Consensus Center will provide supervision, coordination and facilitation for all work teams to enhance the chances of collaborative success. The project will establish a Steering Group that will provide direct guidance and assistance and a Leadership Advisory Group that will assist in connecting this effort with other related efforts in states and nationally. Overall the FCA oversight will be provided by the FCRC Consensus Center Leadership Council.

The FCRC Center brings over 25 years of successful experience in working collaboratively and constructively with partners and stakeholders. The FCA Partners are committed to the project goals and will work together with the Center to implement the activities.

The Center will work with the FSU Askew School of Public Policy and other partners to develop and implement overall FCA initiative evaluation protocols as well as project monitoring and evaluation. This will in turn be incorporated into the ongoing process including annual reviews and reports, strategic and operating plans with partners.

## NEXT STEPS

Through the Florida Civic Advance, we will seek to develop and sustain a shared state-wide civic policy and research agenda, meaningful measurement systems, ongoing communication and coordination, collaborative activities, and a strong network support organization. To our knowledge this has not been attempted in any other state.

In 2014, the Florida Consensus Center and its partners will continue planning in the four project activity areas, recruit additional partners, seek funding, and develop demonstration projects. Those who are interested in participating in or supporting the Florida Civic Advance should contact Robert Jones at [rmjones@fsu.edu](mailto:rmjones@fsu.edu). For more information about the theoretical and research foundations of the project please contact Stuart Langton, Ph.D. at [slangton@mindspring.com](mailto:slangton@mindspring.com).



## THE COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FLORIDA CIVIC ADVANCE

*The FCRC Florida Consensus Center, located at Florida State University, was established by the Florida legislature over 25 years ago to help find solutions for contentious public policy issues. Since then it has undertaken hundreds of successful projects to achieve consensus in planning and regulatory matters covering a range of topics including land use, construction and building codes, transportation, economic development, environment, water resources, energy, education, emergency management and regional and community visioning.<sup>2</sup> The Center has also sponsored an awards program and training events to promote consensus building among public leaders.<sup>3</sup>*

*Recently, the Center's Leadership Council, a distinguished advisory group<sup>4</sup>, urged the Center to expand and broaden the focus of these programs to address challenges related to civility, civic leadership, and collaboration in Florida. The Center developed an initial concept paper, "Collaborative Leadership and Florida's Civic Future," that examined the state of Florida's civic culture and proposed a project for the Center to undertake in partnership with other interested organizations to strengthen civic capacity and collaborative governance in Florida communities.<sup>5</sup>*

*This 2<sup>nd</sup> paper sets out the case for civic improvement in Florida and provides a project framework for the Project. We have continued to benefit from the generous input, collaboration and insights of individuals representing a range of organizations. To date, in addition to the Consensus Center's Leadership Council, this has included consultations with the FSU Rueben O'D. Askew School of Public Administration and Policy, UCF Florida Institute of Government, UCF Frey Institute of Politics, Leadership Florida, Florida League of Cities, the Florida Association of Counties, Florida Regional Councils Association, the Florida City County Managers Association, Volunteer Florida, the Florida Chamber Foundation, the AARP Florida, the Village Square, Tallahassee Community College, Leon County, the Florida Philanthropic Network, the Federal Reserve and the World Bank among others. We are continuing outreach conversations to refine the concept and expand the network of interested organizations that want to contribute to the Florida Civic Advance.*



## CONSENSUS CENTER

*"Facilitating Consensus Solutions, Supporting Collaborative Action"*

**The Florida State University**

<http://consensus.fsu.edu>

---

<sup>2</sup> See, [http://consensus.fsu.edu/projects\\_2011.shtml](http://consensus.fsu.edu/projects_2011.shtml)

<sup>3</sup> See, <http://consensus.fsu.edu/awards/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> See, [http://consensus.fsu.edu/leadership\\_council/index.html](http://consensus.fsu.edu/leadership_council/index.html)

<sup>5</sup> "Collaborative Leadership and Florida's Civic Future: a Concept Paper" December 2013, [http://consensus.fsu.edu/Civic-Advance/pdfs/Collaborative\\_Leadership\\_and\\_Floridas\\_Civic\\_Future\\_November\\_2013.pdf](http://consensus.fsu.edu/Civic-Advance/pdfs/Collaborative_Leadership_and_Floridas_Civic_Future_November_2013.pdf)